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SPEECH

OF

MR. LEAKE, OF VIRGINIA,

ON THE

OREGON QUESTION.

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

FEBRUARY 3, 1846.

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S P E E C H .

Mr. LEAKE rose, and addressed the committee as follows:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I am not one of those who are disposed to regret the protracted debate which the question before us has elicited in this House. I am not one of those who believe that when a question of the magnitude and importance, the acknowledged importance of this, is brought up for consideration and decision, the debate in relation to its merits and to the consequences which may result from it, ought to be at all limited. It is a question as to which the people of the United States are demanding at our hands the fullest and most thorough investigation which our minds are capable of bestowing upon it. When the eyes of the nation are turned towards our deliberations here—when all classes and interests are involved in the consideration and decision of this question—I say it behooves the American Congress, it behooves the representatives of this great confederacy, to deliberate well and to consider maturely before they come to a decision on its merits.

It is, indeed, no ordinary question that we are called upon to decide. It is, I firmly believe, as important a one as any that has ever engaged the attention of the American Congress since the foundation of the government, not excepting even the momentous declaration of war, and the deliberations which preceded it, in 1812. I have given to it whatsoever consideration my feeble powers have enabled me to give. I have investigated it as maturely as I could; and such are the impressions and such the conclusions at which my mind has arrived.

A spirit of levity unbecoming this body, and unworthy of the occasion, has sometimes manifested itself in the course of this discussion. And I could well rejoice had no matter foreign to the question and extraneous to the subject under consideration been introduced, so that I might be at liberty to march directly up to the question, as is my wont, and confine my attention, and the attention of the committee, if I shall be so fortunate as to obtain it, exclusively to that point. But, sir, I am not thus at liberty. For, high as are the responsibilities under which I acknowledge myself to be as a representative in the Congress of the United States—high as is the duty which I owe to this great confederacy of States—yet there is one duty even higher and more sacred, and which calls were loudly upon me for at least a passing notice.

The State which I have the honor in part to represent on this floor, has been again assailed here by honorable gentlemen from all parts of the hall. Her representatives have been arraigned in a body—not put upon a separate trial, and allowed each to plead guilty or not guilty as he might feel—by gentlemen who have thought proper to arraign the Commonwealth of Virginia; and to send intimations abroad, which have been carried on the wings of the press from one end of the Union to the other, that the representatives of that State—those to whom she has confided her interests—are false to their duty and to their country, and recreant to those obligations which they owe to their constituents.

The gentleman from Illinois, [Mr. HORN] my friend near me, on Friday last, I believe, took occa-

sion to draw a contrast between what he was pleased to term the ancient and modern patriotism of Virginia, and to read a homily as to what were the duties of her democratic members here, with a view to show that we who are the accredited organs of that State do not speak fairly the sentiments of the people whom we represent. He read also an extract from a speech made by a distinguished gentleman, formerly a member of this House, to show that Virginia had departed from the faith of her fathers, and that we, her representatives, were occupying ground not only at war with the interests of the country, but irreconcilable with the ground which that Commonwealth had herself taken. It is a little remarkable that whilst the gentleman was reading the speech of Governor Floyd, he did not remember (if, indeed, he had ever investigated the matter sufficiently to know) that the position which that distinguished gentleman took, (and he spoke the voice of Virginia,) was identical, in all respects, with the position now assumed by her representatives. What was it? The speech was made in 1829, two years after the joint convention had been renewed, subject to the limitation in the convention of 1827, to be terminated on one year's notice. And yet that distinguished legislator proposed a law here to take possession of Oregon without giving the notice required under the convention. He proposed a stronger measure than the representatives of Virginia now propose, although we, too, have one mode of settling the controversy as I shall presently show. He desired to erect a military post at the mouth of the Columbia river without giving the notice; and the gentleman from Illinois, if his position is correct, should have denounced him, as well as us, with the intention to steal the territory in spite of the vigilance of the people who in fact claim it as their own. I say to the gentleman that, in judging of what belongs to the patriotism of Virginia, whether ancient or modern, he had better leave her representatives to themselves. They are fully competent to judge. We are responsible to that State, not to the State which the gentleman represents. I trow, sir, that the gentleman will find his hands full in settling that long account which never fails to run up against a representative by the time he reaches home; and although he has kindly offered to take charge of us, my word for it, the people I represent (and I believe I may speak for the whole Commonwealth of Virginia) will not thank him for his interference.

But, sir, this is not all. The speech of the gentleman from Tennessee, [Mr. JOHNSON]—and it will be remembered that we had here yesterday a beautiful episode arising out of it—contained a still more wanton assault upon the Old Dominion. I will read an extract, not only to show the taste and elegance of the gentleman's diction, but the character of the charge which he has preferred against us.

He says:

"Why, the Old Dominion—God bless her!—that had been in the shackles of conservatism for several years past—now, when she had freed herself, as they had hoped—when Mr. Rives had been deposed from office on account of his

conservative position—when the Old Dominion stood erect, redeemed, regenerated, and disenthralled from the fetters of conservatism—that her statesmen should now return like a sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire—was truly a thing to be deprecated by every friend of hers, and by every lover of his country. Now, if his information was correct, ten to four of her politicians had relapsed into the position of conservatism. Now, if Mr. Rives was in power, he would undoubtedly stand at the head of the representatives from the Old Dominion, leading on their cohorts. But the people of the Old Dominion would yet speak for themselves; their voices would be heard from the western mountains to the Atlantic coast, proclaiming in thunder tones our right to the whole of Oregon up to 54 degrees 40 minutes."

Did the gentleman mean to intimate, (continued Mr. L.), in this grave charge, that the State of Virginia, like that which he represents, had ever departed from the republican faith, here or elsewhere? Did he mean to insinuate that there ever had been a time when the constitution of our country was endangered, when the principles of the republican party, which contain in themselves the true exposition of that constitution, had been assailed, when conservatism, or whiggism had threatened to sweep away the great landmarks of the republican policy—did he mean to say that the time had ever been when the Commonwealth of Virginia had fallen from the proud position she has always occupied in the ranks of the republican party? This lecture comes from the State of Tennessee. Remember it! From the State of Tennessee! And the gentleman who failed to set his own household in order, undertakes to regulate ours; he who had proved inadequate to preserve his own State, to raise her up from the slough into which she had fallen, undertakes to interfere between us and our constituents, and to tell us that we have departed from the faith of our fathers. I say to him that when the State of Tennessee, like Virginia, shall have assumed the proud position to which she is so well entitled—when she shall have cast off the slough of federalism, in which she has been engulfed for some years past—when she shall have proved more faithful to her own distinguished son than Virginia has done, it will be time enough for him to lecture us and to show us what our duties are.

Sir, I have not come here to pass any eulogium on the State which I am to represent. But since she has been thus assailed, and an effort deliberately made to cast a blot upon her hitherto unsullied escutcheon, since she has been accused, arraigned, and (if the testimony of the accuser is to be taken) convicted, I have felt it my duty to say a word in her vindication. As to the charge against myself, (for I am one of the ten representatives of Virginia on this floor against whom it is brought,) that I had relapsed from the ancient faith of my State, I let it pass by me "as the idle wind that I regard not;" but I felt it due to old Virginia, the bulwark of the republican party now and heretofore, to set her right before Congress and the country.

I know that when the gentleman from Illinois and others told us that we, who occupy an antagonistic position to that which he holds, were appealing to the fears of the people, they did not understand the force of the terms which they used. We appealing to the fears of the people? We of the South—of Virginia and of South Carolina in particular—to be accused of appealing to the fears of the people! If we had made such an appeal, it is one that would have fallen as upon the ears of night, which could not be responded to, because there was no such feeling existing. But we made

no appeal, except to their caution and prudence. We did not attempt to excite their prejudices or alarm their fears by warning them that without just cause or provocation there was danger to their rights or their interests.

A word more before I close this portion of my remarks. I say to all those who have assailed us, that whilst we do not vaunt ourselves on our achievements, yet, when thus assailed, I must, as one of her representatives, say that Virginia has never thought it necessary to erect any monuments to her sons; and it is not our boast, as it was justly the boast of the gentleman from Maryland [Mr. GILES] the other day, that his State "gave graves to her enemies and monuments to her defenders." We make no such boast, because the fame of our Commonwealth is so well established on the pages of our history that it requires no sculptured marble or pyramid of stone to commemorate her achievements, or to perpetuate the virtues of her sons. She builds her monuments on the battle-field, and stamps the record of her achievements on the destinies of the nation.

I pass now, Mr. Chairman, to another matter extremely irrelevant in its character, and which I regret to be compelled to refer to. I speak of the attempt which is made here to read out of the democratic church all who do not agree in the propriety of giving this notice, and to the repeated allusions, in that connexion, to the Baltimore convention and its action. I say I regret that any allusion has been made on this floor to a mere party convention—whether held by whigs or democrats. The time has yet to come when caucus machinery shall control the action of the federal government. The time has yet to come when the dictates of a convention shall be regarded as law by an American Congress. And I, for one, do not hesitate to say to this House, and through this House to the country, that I care not what may be the dictates of party, unless they meet the approbation of my conscience I will not bow down to them. No consideration shall induce me to surrender the rights and interests of my constituents, or to sacrifice one tittle of the honor and true glory of the nation, because the party with which it is my pride to act, and with which I hope I ever shall act, may think proper to lay down a different rule of action.

But what was the decision of the Baltimore convention? Did that make Oregon a party question? A certain running resolution asserted our rights to Oregon. Nothing was said about a notice. The convention did not require any one of the democratic party to give that notice. It was an abstract declaration of our right to Oregon, in which I fully concur, and which I expect to carry out by my action on this floor, either at this session, or at some subsequent time, if I should have the honor of a seat here. Is this a party question? My friend and colleague, [Mr. PENDLETON,] the "lone star" of whiggism from the State of Virginia, has fallen into some error. In the fierce vehemence of his denunciation, he has given a party aspect to the debate unworthy of the occasion, and unworthy of his position as a representative here. I am not about to enter into the history of the Baltimore convention, nor to reply to the hits of my colleague against that convention. It is true, he told us that that convention had brought forth, rather suddenly, a certain distinguished individual; that the heterogeneous elements of which the democratic party was composed must insure its speedy dissolution; and, in

his imagination, he was contemplating the prospect of that brilliant party with which he had, for at least ten years, been associated, gaining ascendancy in the councils of the nation, and of our own State. I cannot but think, Mr. Chairman, that he had, in his imagination, gone back to the scenes of the extra session of 1841, when a party, flushed with one of the most brilliant triumphs that had ever been achieved, came here in the full tide of successful experiment; and, in the short space of six weeks, (a less time than would be required, in the estimation of the gentleman from Michigan, [Mr. CHURMAN,] to take Canada,) dissolved into its original elements, and was scattered to the four winds of heaven, never more to be gathered together.

But is this a party question? If the Baltimore convention so settled it, then I charge upon the democratic party here that they have proved recreant to their duty, and false to the instructions they have received. I say, if it is a party question, it is undoubtedly true that they have violated the instructions of the democratic party. Do you not remember, sir, that at the last session, the proposal to give this notice was under consideration? It was submitted in an independent form. It was proposed to be incorporated in a bill then before the House. And what was the vote? Of the 82 members who voted in the negative, 79 were democrats, and 3 only whigs; while, of the 139 who voted in the affirmative, 67 were whigs and 53 democrats. And this, too, at the session which immediately followed the Baltimore convention, and after the election of Mr. Polk. But one brief year ago, then, we find the democratic party on this floor repudiating the very issue which gentlemen now say was made by that convention, and decided by the people in that contest. Sir, if it is a party question now, it was so then. If there is now any obligation on the democracy here to vote for this notice, that obligation was equally strong upon them at the last session. And gentlemen who trust us with a departure from the household faith on this question, do but pass the heaviest censure upon themselves. The gentleman from Indiana in my eye, [Mr. KENNEDY,] who made a most amusing, as well as an argumentative speech on this question, voted at the last session against the notice.

Mr. KENNEDY explained. He said that, as he presumed it was not the desire of his friend from Virginia to misrepresent him on this subject, he would beg leave to state, that he had at no time during the last session voted against giving this notice; but on the contrary, in all possible ways he had voted for it. He had concurred with his colleague [Mr. OWEN] in its introduction as an independent proposition; and after it was connected with a separate and different proposition, he had voted for them both together. It was true that he had voted against connecting these separate and distinct propositions in one bill; and one of the strongest objections he had against this connexion, was the fact that it might defeat the final passage of this very notice, and possibly endanger both measures.

This was his position, and he understood it to be the position of nearly all, if not all, of those who voted with him on that occasion.

Mr. LEAKE continued. These episodes, Mr. chairman, are not very convenient or agreeable; particularly under the one-hour rule. I only state a fact which the journal proves. And I assert that of those distinguished orators of the democratic

party who have spoken this session in favor of the notice, all, with the exception of five or six, voted at the last session against it. The gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. THOMPSON] undertook yesterday to explain away his vote. And almost every democrat who now charges us with a departure from the household faith, because we will not go for the notice, themselves voted against it twelve months ago.

But I refer to another consideration. If this be a party question, then I do not hesitate to say that the democratic party is now dissolved, and that there must be a new formation of parties. If to oppose the notice makes a man no democrat, then to support the notice is, of course, to make a democrat of the first water. And if you apply the test of my colleague, who spoke several days ago, [Mr. BAYLY,] the distinguished gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. ADAMS,] the gentleman from Ohio, [Mr. GIDDINGS,] the gentleman from Pennsylvania, [Mr. POLLOCK,] the gentleman from Alabama, [Mr. HULLMAN, the "lone star" from that State,] and some dozen other whigs, are now democrats of the first water; whilst we, who bore the burden and heat of the day, when, in the memorable contest of 1844, the principles of the republican party were staked "upon the cast of the die;" we who were found in the breach, eye to eye and front to front with the whigs, and who contributed somewhat to the splendid victory which then crowned our efforts, are now to be denounced as traitors to the democratic party and its principles. Sir, if I believed that the distinguished man who now fills the presidential chair with so much honor to the country—that man of whom I can proudly say that I confide in him as fully as I would in any man that ever held that exalted station—if, I say, he could give countenance to these assaults upon a portion of his best friends, simply because they could not concur with him in a question of mere expediency involving no political principle whatever, I should hold him unworthy of the station.

But, Mr. Chairman, I have not yet referred to the question before the committee. I have felt it my duty to place myself right before the people whom I represent, and to say a few words in vindication of those of my colleagues who occupy the same position.

I must confess, and the remark comes in patly here, that I have seen enough in the discussion in this House, and of the action of certain individuals, to excite the fears of a novice like myself. I have seen enough to have caused me, had I been an advocate for this notice, (which I was not,) to pause and deliberate before taking a step so fatal and irrevocable. What have we seen here? We are told that this is a party question. I congratulate gentlemen, then, on their new allies. I have seen the veteran federalism of Massachusetts, the wild, reckless, and impudent fanaticism of all the non-slaveholding States, (which finds its appropriate representative even on this floor,) and the high and generous chivalry of the West, slaking hands in strange and unnatural concord over this most portentous proposition. I have seen abolitionists and federalists, tariff men, bank men, and internal improvement men, all meeting and acting in harmonious concert upon what they say is a democratic question. Sir, if these are the emblems of democracy, I am not a democrat. But they are not so. And gentlemen who undertake to arraign us, know full well that the test is not test at all.

When I was elected to represent the fifth congressional district of Virginia, I was elected by a people who had ever held their representatives exclusively responsible to themselves. The charter under which I hold my seat here, comes from the people of Virginia, or a portion of them; and whilst I have every confidence in the incumbent of the presidential chair—whilst I have every confidence in my brethren of the democratic party—and whilst I am determined to continue by connexion with that party (grappled to it as I am with hooks of principle) through all time to come; yet I look neither to the White House, nor to members here, nor to party dictation out of doors, as to what I shall do. I shall go home to my people; to them I shall give a full explanation of my course here; and I am content to abide by their verdict; and neither the gentleman from Illinois, [Mr. Hoge,] nor the gentleman from Tennessee, [Mr. Jounson,] shall be permitted to step in between us.

I proceed now, Mr. Chairman, to notice a few of the considerations which will guide my action on this question of notice. And I beg leave, at the outset, to observe that I shall not go into a discussion of the merits of our title to Oregon, or into an examination of its merits as compared with that of Great Britain. The matter has been so fully discussed and elaborated here, and in the able exposition of our two Secretaries of State, Mr. Calhoun and Mr. Buchanan, that it would be a work of supererogation to attempt to throw any new light upon it. Suffice it to say, that I hold the American title to be clear and unquestionable up to 49° and-a-half. I hold our title against England as good to 54° 43'; but I cannot hold, with the chairman of the Committee on Territories, [Mr. Douglass,] that we may go up to the Arctic circle. Believing this, I shall pursue that course which I believe best calculated to secure our rights to the whole country, and to bring this controversy to an amicable settlement.

What, then, is the question for us to decide? So far it has been confined exclusively to the propriety of giving or not giving this notice; but the fact is that the proposition to give this notice is one of the least considerations connected with the question.

What do gentlemen mean when they say that you are to give this notice, and that it is an amicable measure?

If you do no more than give the notice, I agree that there could not possibly be any danger to the peace of the country. But that is the least part of it. Your notice means something more than mere notice, or it means nothing at all; you contemplate strong ulterior action, to give it force and vitality; otherwise you are merely acting the part of a bravo. You say that the joint occupancy shall terminate in twelve months from the date of the notice; but you also tell Great Britain, by inevitable implication, that you mean to take steps to enforce your title. Is not this so? Must it not be inevitably so? It is an axiom—a truth that, merely stated, proves itself.

Suppose that at the end of the twelve months this controversy shall remain open and unadjusted, and that Great Britain and the United States should have been unable (and I believe this notice to be an insuperable barrier in the way) to adjust it by negotiation: what, then, will you do? In the first place, you will announce to Great Britain that the notice having been duly given, and believing our title to be clear and unquestionable, you are determined to take such measures as may be requisite to enforce

that title, and to take possession. Is this peace? Is this calculated to secure an amicable adjustment of the difficulty? On the contrary, I repeat that, in my judgment, it is a declaration of war in embryo. It is saying to Great Britain that at the expiration of the twelve months, we will take the country by force.

I shall not undertake to enter into a disquisition upon the relative power of Great Britain and the United States. I know the force, the mighty and irrepressible energy of this nation; and I do not fear a contest with Great Britain, or any other power. But when gentlemen undertake to tell us of the ease with which we can overrun Great Britain and her dependencies—at all events on this continent—it seems to me that they are going to war without counting the cost. Gentlemen say that this is a peaceful measure. I say that the speeches of gentlemen look to it as a war measure. If there be no spirit of war in it, if gentlemen who advocate the notice do not believe that it will lead to war, whence these beautiful apostrophes to the American eagle, and indignant philippics against the British lion? Whence the eloquent appeals to the patriotism and the anti-English feelings of the American people, or these fiery denunciations of the arrogance of British power? Are these the elements of peace, or its signs and emblems?

We have seen gentlemen indulging in fierce denunciations of the power of Great Britain; we have heard them speak of the ease with which we could overrun her and conquer her dependencies. A gentleman from Missouri, [Mr. Sims,] who made an eloquent speech here, undertook to tell us, that with no other weapon than the ox-poles of his wagon drivers we could conquer the territory and drive the British out. The gentleman from Michigan, [Mr. Chipman,] in the intensity of his zeal, took occasion to tell us that his people could go over into Canada, and in ninety days annex it as an appendage to the State which he represents. And the gentleman from Indiana, [Mr. Kennedy,] finding that these two gentlemen had anticipated him in the conquest of the whole country—having no world for himself to conquer—but meeting the British lion in his path, very coolly takes him by the beard, and throws him across the Atlantic, where he is now, doubtless, crouching in some of the secret recesses of the Tower of London, afraid to show his beard again on this side of the great water. Are these, I ask, the emblems of peace? I say that the rapidity of their conquests finds no parallel, unless it be that recorded in the pages of sacred history, where the walls of Jericho were overthrown simply by the blowing of rams' horns. And gentlemen seem to think that they can conquer Great Britain by a process as simple and as easy. Why, Mr. Chairman, Cæsar, in the height of his power and the pride of his glory, could conquer almost with the rapidity of the lightning's stroke; but it was necessary that he should first come and see before he could overcome. Napoleon, almost by the magic of his name, overran many of the mightiest monarchies of Europe, but he was backed by hundreds of thousands of the finest troops the world ever saw. But the ancient glory of the one, and the greener and just as imperishable laurels of the other, have been far surpassed by the wordy heroes who have figured in this brilliant campaign; and I have seen no parallel to the achievements of gentlemen on this floor, except in the conquest of Jericho, or in the classic pages of Shakspeare. We are told that in the time of Henry IV, certain hot spirits

assembled in the quiet recesses of the mountains of Wales, and very coolly proceeded to dethrone the reigning monarch, and to parcel out his dominions among themselves.

To so great an exactness did they carry this imaginary conquest, that they "cavilled about the ninth part of a hair." But two hours of time "by Shrewsbury clock" sufficed to show the futility of their calculation. And I tell gentlemen here, that, whatever fancies they may think proper to indulge in, however easy in the distance the conquest of Great Britain may appear, something more than bluster, something more effectual than words, will be required to accomplish the object.

There is another consideration, Mr. Chairman, which, to my mind, presents a conclusive objection to this notice. When my friend from Illinois, [Mr. HOCKEY] and the gentleman from Tennessee, [Mr. JOHNSON,] who have been hunting in pairs against Virginia, were assailing us for the want of democracy on this question, I could not but remember the surprise with which I had seen them sit coolly by, and hear the most monstrous fallacies advanced on this floor, (on the part of democrats, too,) yet fold their arms in inglorious apathy, and not rebuke them for their want of consistency with the principles declared by the Baltimore convention. Was the Oregon question the only question embraced in the resolutions of that convention? Was nothing said about the tariff? Was nothing said of other great issues? Of internal improvements? When I heard the gentleman from Pennsylvania, [Mr. THOMPSON,] in the course of the facetious speech he made here the other day, declaring himself in favor of Oregon, and at the same time boldly announcing that the tariff would remain untouched, I wondered that some of these fiery members from the West did not read him a lecture for his non-conformity to one of the fundamental articles of the democratic creed. But, to my surprise, they regard that gentleman as one of the best democrats on this floor, whilst I am one of the worst. Strange, that gentlemen who advocate the most monstrous error that has ever exhibited itself in our government, should be permitted to hold their places in the democratic party, whilst I and my colleagues are to be read out of it because we do not concur in a mere question of expediency. That, too, was a question settled by the contest of 1844. The people settled it. That contest, however, was but "the war of the revolution—that of independence is yet to come," and it remains to be seen whether we can consummate it.

What is the state of the relations between this country and Great Britain? We have now ascertained that, if a proper line of policy shall be pursued between the two countries—if the amicable relations heretofore existing between them shall be cultivated—the result must be in a short time to draw the commercial ties that bind us together more closely, and in a manner that will redound equally to the interests and the honor of both nations.

Much has been said about the restrictive policy of England—a policy which is unworthy of the enlightened age in which we live. But now, when we have assurance almost doubly sure, that if the government of England go on in the line of policy which she has marked out, that system of restriction is to be relaxed, is it not madness to interpose any obstacle in the way? Within two years a material modification of her tariff system has been made. Her restrictions upon the provision trade

have been materially lightened, and we have now an almost certain prospect of the unconditional and total repeal of her corn-laws. These things are but the commencement of a great and glorious reform; and when the people of England shall have been once begun to feel the benefits of free trade in one respect, they will demand it in all. We have ascertained that even Sir Robert Peel, the organ and the spokesman of the stern and hitherto unyielding tory interest of England, has been compelled to bow before the advancing spirit of the age—of freedom of trade and freedom of thought. On our own side of the water a similar state of things exists. Our people have awakened to the importance of the subject; and if the canvass of 1844 decided anything, it decided that these advances on the part of Great Britain should be met in a corresponding spirit here. And in a few years, if this spirit is cultivated, it will prove of incalculable benefit to the people whom we all represent. No man can estimate the advantages to accrue to the agricultural interests, and in fact to all classes of our people, from a system of perfect reciprocity of trade between us and the nations of Europe. Is not this glorious prospect endangered by the notice? I adverted sometime since to the fact that gentlemen who advocate the notice consider it a war measure, and amongst this number, Mr. Chairman, is yourself; for the amendment you have proposed indicates as plainly as that two and two make four, the fears you entertain that war is to grow out of it. The second section of your bill reads as follows:

Sec. 2. And be it further resolved, That the President of the United States is hereby authorized to repel any and all aggressions upon the commerce of the United States; to resist any attempt which may be made to exercise exclusive jurisdiction over any part of the territory claimed by the United States; and to repel invasions of the same; and for these purposes to employ such portions of the militia of the United States as he may deem advisable, agreeably to the provisions of the second and third sections of an act entitled "An act giving to the President of the United States additional powers for the defence of the United States, in certain cases, against invasion and for other purposes," approved the third of March eighteen hundred and thirty-nine, to accept the services of any number of volunteers, not exceeding thousand, to serve during the war, or for any less period, in the manner provided for by an act entitled "An act authorizing the President of the United States to accept the services of volunteers, and to raise an additional regiment of dragoons or mounted riflemen," approved the twenty-third of May, eighteen hundred and thirty-six; to employ the regular military force of the United States, and to expand and increase the same to any number not exceeding thousand men; to complete the middle armed vessels now authorized by law, and to equip, man, and employ in actual service all the naval force of the United States, and to build, purchase, or charter arms, equip, and man, such vessels and steamboats as he shall deem necessary for the purposes aforesaid.

And again it provides:

Sec. 3. And be it further resolved, That the sum of millions of dollars is hereby appropriated and placed at the disposal of the President of the United States, for the purpose of executing the provisions aforesaid, and providing for which the Secretary of the Treasury is authorized to borrow money, or on credit of the United States, and to emit certificates to that effect, and thereon, agreeably to the provisions of the fifth section of the act aforesaid, approved March third eighteen hundred and thirty-nine.

Now, (Continued Mr. L. HARRIS,) I ask, if you give the notice, have you, Mr. Chairman, not put it on the ground that this House will be obliged to put it on? And I do not hesitate to say that if this unequalled notice shall be given, I shall be prepared (I do not say to vote for so strong a bill as this) but to arm the nation, in order that it may be in a condition to repel aggression, and to enforce the declaration it will have made. For if we once get into war, or



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the danger of war, we shall have to meet it as becomes the American Congress. Give this notice—accompany it with a bill of this character—think you that Great Britain will quietly fold her arms, not anticipating the possibility of a conflict? And what then becomes of the prospect to which I have adverted?

The tariff system of England would not be modified, while the iniquitous bill of 1842 would be perpetuated, and all the issues which the people of this country decided in 1844 would be swept away.

My friend from Mississippi, [Mr. THOMPSON,] spoke yesterday of one consideration, which, I think, requires notice at the hands of southern cotton-growing gentlemen. He said that England would not go to war because she depended on us for the raw material to sustain her manufactures. There are two sides to that question.

Mr. JACOB THOMPSON explained. He said he had only urged that as one of the considerations.

Mr. LEAKE. Well, then, one of the considerations was that England could not do without a supply of cotton from us, and, therefore, that she would not fight. I do not doubt that this consideration would operate in some degree. But I appeal to the cotton interest—(and I am of their kindred, feeling as they feel, my heart palpitating to every injury inflicted upon them, for I am the representative of an agricultural interest)—I say I appeal to them to say if Great Britain cannot flourish without our cotton, can our cotton flourish without the English market? Of the two and a half millions of bales raised in the United States, England takes over two millions, or more than four-fifths; and yet we are to be told that she will not go to war, because she cannot do without our cotton, when, in fact, all of us know that we cannot do without the English market. The gross delusion that the tariff of 1842 was to build up a home market has been exploded. It is at least in the womb of time—and I give it as my opinion—the promise never can be realized. So that, by a war, we would be cut off from the market in England, whilst we should find no adequate market here to counterbalance the loss.

But this is an unpropitious time, for another consideration, at which to give this notice. I know that some attempts have been made to ridicule the position which many of us occupy as to the true mode of settling this Oregon question. We say that, without giving any notice, we may proceed to take the proper steps to secure our ultimate possession of the country, and to place ourselves in such a strong and invincible position that Great Britain cannot move us. The gentleman from Illinois [Mr. HOGG] told us that this would be stealing the territory; but I ask attention to an admission made by himself, which goes as far as I could wish. That gentleman told us that without giving the notice, we could properly resort to all the measures recommended by the President in his message. What, sir, are those measures?

To encourage emigration to Oregon by all proper means. To establish at once military posts; to establish post-routes, and to guarantee by the strong arm of the government the rights of American citizens acquired in Oregon. All this we have the power to do without notice, and it is all that is necessary to be done to ensure our ultimate possession of the country.

If you give the notice you must do more than this. You must take forcible possession of the country and maintain it at every hazard, whilst the advan-

tages to be secured, identically the same: I have indicated. I tion of the joint con

Great Britain has twenty-odd forts erected within the limits of the disputed territory; that she has numerous settlements there, and is engaged in the actual cultivation of the soil. England, then, has construed the convention for us; and if we have submitted for a period of 30 years to these "encroachments," surely she can have no right to complain if we colonise, with a view to avail ourselves of the benefits stipulated in the agreement between the two countries.

I wish to repeat that I am in favor of all steps requisite to secure our rights, and to encourage emigration. The great argument I have heard here in favor of the notice, is, that negotiations have been brought to a close, and therefore that we must look to ulterior action. If this argument is founded in reason, it would have been good from the time of the adoption of the convention. That convention was resorted to as a substitute for war, as the distinguished gentleman from Massachusetts, [Mr. ADAMS,] (in remarks which I find reported in the "Intelligencer" of the 3d of February last) declared. It was a substitute for war; negotiations had failed. In 1824, another brief attempt to negotiate failed. And again, in 1826, another effort was made to settle the difficulty by negotiation. But the British plenipotentiaries made a proposition to which we could not accede, and it was rejected. Negotiation failed, and the convention was renewed. So that in each of these cases the argument had quite as much force and efficacy as it can have now. But it is precisely for the reason that negotiation has failed that this notice ought not to be given, because if it is given, war is the only alternative. Your negotiations have failed, and therefore you give the notice. It becomes, then, a resort to the *ultima ratio* of nations; and the question must be settled by the struggle of arms, with all the power and resources of the two countries. It is an event fraught with too much horror, and with too vast a destruction of the interests of the two countries to be for a moment contemplated.

One other consideration, and I have closed. In 1843, we had not in Oregon 200 citizens who had gone there to settle. In 1845, we had 8,500. If this increase of population, almost unexampled even in the nearly fabulous growth of population in the States of this great nation, should continue, and the notice should not be given, in two or three years, at the same ratio of increase, we should have not less than 50,000 sturdy sons of the West ready to repel aggression, and preserve the country from British encroachment.

This consideration alone would deter me from giving the notice, and satisfies me that the course I am pursuing is consistent with our rights; for it is to be remembered that the joint convention in no respect detracts from our claim. It does not weaken the strength of our title, but leaves it precisely as it is.

I have thus, Mr. Chairman, hastily expressed the views which have guided me to the conclusion at which I have arrived; and I sincerely trust that, in the ultimate settlement of this momentous question, the real honor and true glory of our country may be preserved untarnished, and its interests guaranteed, as well against foreign aggression as against the effects of hasty and ill-timed legislation here.

